

Poems

HISTORY

Begin with innocence. Then, the missing bones. When did it happen? Who knows

how loss occurs? No photographs. No memory. This is what I have

to go on: the hospital report, my father's words. In front of me:

my feet, each the size of his finger. Now, the gnarled roots of trees.

For thirty years, this question: how do you mourn for something you never had?

X-RAY

I am eight months old and looking for you, daddy, at the other

end of the metal table. Your eyes told me all I need to know—

if I could just remember. I watch the large machine rattle down its track,

feel the cold on my skin, when all these years I wanted

the memory of your hands holding my twisted feet in the right position.

Remembering this now I am still that eight month old,

your son, staring into the eyes of that machine, trying to find you

in the reflection it gives back—nothing from the waist down.

INCUBATOR

As if from a goldfish bowl, through small, fogged eyes. And nowhere

do I find you, even though I know you must have been there. The hands

that turn me are the nurse's hands; the eyes watching are my father's.

But where is the body from which I was born unwhole? Your body almost

died giving birth to mine. Mother, after all these years I am asking why

you never told me. We touch through a sheet of glass. Give me your hand—

help me find those missing bones, clear that infant's eyes. Open them—wider.

BODY LANGUAGE

What is a scar if not the memory of a once open wound? You press your finger between my toes, slide

the soap up the side of my leg, until you reach the scar with the two holes, where the pins were

inserted twenty years ago. Leaning back, I remember how I pulled the pin from my leg, how

in a waist-high cast, I dragged myself from my room to show my parents what I had done.

Your hand on my scar brings me back to the tub and I want to ask you: What do you feel

when you touch me there? I want you to ask me: What am I feeling now? But we do not speak.

You drop the soap in the water and I continue washing, alone. Do you know my father would

bathe my feet, as you do, as if it was the most natural thing. But up to now, I have allowed

only two pair of hands to touch me there, to be the salve for what still feels like an open wound.

The skin has healed but the scars grow deeper—When you touch them what do they tell you about my life?

KENNY FRIES©
Provincetown, Massachusetts